Brigit Of The Celts

Ido

Brigit was one of the great Triple Goddesses of the Celtic people. She appeared as Brigit to the Irish, Brigantia in Northern England, Bride in Scotland, and Brigandu in Brittany. Many legends are told about Brigit. Some say that there are three Brigits: one sister in charge of poetry and inspiration who invented the Ogham alphabet, one in charge of healing and midwifery, and the third in charge of the hearth fire, smithies and other crafts. This actually indicates the separate aspects of her Threefold nature and is a neat division of labor for a hard-working goddess.

Brigit was probably originally a Sun Goddess, and a charming story of her birth is that she was born at sunrise and a tower of flame burst from the forehead of the new born Goddess that reached from Earth to Heaven. It was likely She who inspired the line in the famous Song of Amergin: "I am a fire in the head." Her penchant for smithcraft led to her association by the Romans with Minerva/Athena. As a warrior Goddess, She favored the use of the spear or the arrow. Indeed, various interpretations of her name exist including, "Bright Arrow," "The Bright One," "the Powerful One" and "The High One," depending upon the region and the dialect.

As a Goddess of herbalism, midwifery and healing She was in charge of Water as well as Fire. I don't believe that anyone has ever counted all the vast number of sacred wells and springs named after or dedicated to this Goddess. A story is told of how two lepers came to one of her sacred springs for healing and She instructed one Leper to wash the other. The skin of the freshly bathed man was cleansed of the disease and Brigit told the man who was healed to wash the man who had bathed him so that both men would be whole. The man who was healed was now too disgusted to touch the other Leper and would have left him, but Brigit herself washed the leper and struck down the other arrogant fellow with leprosy once more before he could leave. Offerings to the watery Brigit were cast into the well in the form of coins or, even more ancient, brass or gold rings. Other sacrifices were offered where three streams came together. Her cauldron of Inspiration connected her watery healing aspect with her fiery poetic aspect.

Brigit is clearly the best example of the survival of a Goddess into Christian times. She was canonized by the Catholic church as St. Brigit and various origins are given to this saint. The most popular folk tale is that She was midwife to the Virgin Mary, and thus was always invoked by women in labor. The more official story was that She was a Druid's daughter who predicted the coming of Christianity and then was baptized by St. Patrick. She became

a nun and later an abbess who founded the Abbey at Kildare. The Christian Brigit was said to have had the power to appoint the bishops of her area, a strange role for an abbess, made stranger by her requirement that her bishops also be practicing goldsmiths.

Actually, the Goddess Brigit had always kept a shrine at Kildare, Ireland, with a perpetual flame tended by nineteen virgin priestesses called Daughters of the Flame. No male was ever allowed to come near it; nor did those women ever consort with men. Even their food and other supplies were brought to them by women of the nearby village. When Catholicism took over in Ireland, the shrine became a convent and the priestesses became nuns but the same traditions were held and the eternal flame was kept burning. Their tradition was that each day a different priestess/nun was in charge of the sacred fire and on the 20th day of each cycle, the fire was miraculously tended by Brigit Herself. There into the 18th century, the ancient song was sung to her: "Brigit, excellent woman, sudden flame, may the bright fiery sun take us to the lasting kingdom."

For over a thousand years, the sacred flame was tended by nuns, and no one knows how long before that it had been tended by the priestesses. In 1220 CE, a Bishop became angered by the no-males policy of the Abbey of St. Brigit of Kildare. He insisted that nuns were subordinate to priests and therefore must open their abbey and submit themselves to inspection by a priest. When they refused and asked for another Abbess or other female official to perform any inspections, the Bishop was incensed. He admonished them to obedience and then decreed that the keeping of the eternal flame was a Pagan custom and 6rdered the sacred flame to be extinguished. Even then, She remained the most popular Irish saint along with Patrick. In the 1960's, under Vatican II modernization, it was declared that there was insufficient proof of Brigit's sanctity or even of her historical existence, and so the Church's gradual pogrom against Brigit was successful at last and She was thus de-canonized. It is very difficult to obtain images or even holy cards of ST. Brigit outside of Ireland anymore.

Her festival is held on February 1st or 2nd. It corresponds to the ancient Celtic fire festival of Imbolc or Oimelc which celebrated the birthing and freshening of sheep and goats (it really is a Feast of Milk). This festival was Christianized as Candlemas or Lady Day and Her Feast day, La Feill Bhride, was attended by tremendous local celebration and elaborate rituals. Her festival is also called Brigit. Brigit (the Goddess and the Festival) represents the stirring of life again after the dead months of the winter, and her special blessings are called forth at this time. Since She was booted out of the Church for being Pagan, it is incumbent upon us Pagans to restore Her worship to its former glory especially those of us of Celtic ancestry. Here is an ancient rite to invite Brigit into your home at the time of her Holiday:

Clean your hearth thoroughly in the morning and lay a fire without kindling it, then make yourself a "Bed for Brigid" and place it near the hearth. The bed can be a small basket with covers and tiny pillow added as plain or fancy as you like. If you have no hearth, you can use the stove and put the bed behind it. Then at sundown light a candle rubbed with rosemary oil and invite Brigit into your home and into her bed; use the candle to kindle your hearth-fire if possible. Make your own poem to invite Her or use the ancient song mentioned earlier. Let the candle burn at least all night in a safe place. You might even want to begin the custom of keeping the eternal flame; it is a popular custom in some magickal and Wiccan traditions. After all, it's up to us now to keep the spirit of Brigit alive and well for the next thousand years at least!!!

Brigid is not really a Celtic Mother Goddess. She is generally considered a Goddess of fire/smithcraft, of poetry and of healing. One of her roles is as midwife, but although she has a son, she is not usually seen as a mother.

I don't know any books that deal specifically with Brighidh, but please look for a book called "Celtic Mythology" by Proinsias MacCana and for "Gods and Heroes of the Celts" by Marie Lousie Sjoestadt for more information about Celtic deities. They are both VERY good sources.

Brighidh is a Goddess of healing, smithcraft and poetry, brewer of mead and ale, a lawgiver, a midwife, supposedly daughter of the Daghda, mother of the poet Cairbre, and of the Gods Brian, Iuchar and Iucharba. She was transformed into a Christian Saint and became the foster mother of Christ. Some sources say that the

healer/smith/poet were embodied in one Goddess, other sources claim that she was three sisters, all named Brighidh.

Her holy day falls (on our calendar) on February 2nd (I wonder if She likes groundhogs...) called Imbolc, Oimelc or Lady Day. Candles are blessed that day in the Catholic churches.

By: Ido

To: Teakan

Re: Something about Brighid:

Brigit/Brigid/Bride was the daughter of Dagda. She was the protector of the poets, the forge and the healing persons. Her son Ruadan, which she had with Bres, was killed by Goibnui. For her died son she sounds the first kenning of Eireland. She also was put into the cult and the person of Brigit from Kildare, which made the first female parish after Christianity falls into Eireland. The convent of Kildare has had a never-ending fire, which was protected by the sisters of the parish. The saint Brigit is the second patron saint of Eireland. within the Scottish tradition Brigit belongs together with the time of the year "Season of the lambs" and the coming of spring. Brigit overcomes the control of the Cailleach Bheur.

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